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Parents' Guidelines for the Transition from Chinese Homes to American Preschools

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PARENTS' GUIDELINES FOR THE TRANSITION FROM CHINESE
HOMES TO AMERICAN PRESCHOOLS

By

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A Project

submitted in fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Education, Early Childhood

Boise State University

May 2009

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents, Weiping Zhang and Weibei Wu, for supporting me in my pursuit for a higher education and in obtaining my goals. They believed in me and helped me to believe in myself. My family is my strength in any goal I set for myself.

My grandparents also deserve thanks. They are truly the model for educational advocates for their granddaughter that extend through life.

Lastly, I want to thank my advisor, committee members and friends, who encouraged and supported me in many ways through this process.

ABSTRACT

The Chinese are the largest ethnic group within the Asian-American population, consisting of 23% of the Asian population living in the United States. For first generation Chinese-American parents, they face the choice of schools for their children, starting with preschool. Preschool is a vital start for all children. When Chinese children transition from homes to American preschools, they face the challenge of an unfamiliar culture, a different language from home and a new environment. This project will focus on the transition Chinese children make from home to American preschools. It will explore the similarities and differences between beliefs and ideas on early childhood education between Chinese parents and American preschools. This project briefly reviews the literature on American preschools. Finally, this project will provide some suggestions on how parents can prepare for this transition. The product of this project will be a handbook for Chinese parents, which will provide brief information about a typical American preschool and the suggestions and ideas on developing consistency between Chinese homes and American preschools. This handbook will also help Chinese parents prepare and support their Chinese children entering an American preschool.

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CHAPTER I

IDENTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Background

Population estimates from the 2007 U.S. Census Bureau indicates that 2.8 million Chinese, excluding Taiwanese, live in America. According to the document *Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics* (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), the Chinese are the largest ethnic group within the Asian-American population, consisting of 23% of the Asian population living in the United States. Although there are no data that show how many Chinese children ages birth to 8 years old are in the U.S., Chinese children have been an important population within the American education system. These Chinese children include those born in the U.S. of Chinese citizen parents, children who are born in China and accompany their parents to the United States, and children born in America whose parents have become U.S. citizens. When these Chinese children are preschool-aged (i.e., 3-5 years old) and live in the U.S., many of their parents will choose a preschool for them. This project will focus on the transition from Chinese such homes to American preschools.

Need for the Project

For many preschool-aged Chinese children, the transition from home, or infant and toddler programs, to the preschool setting will have to be faced. In states with a large population of Chinese and Chinese immigrants, such as California and New York, some Chinese preschools are available, but few Chinese preschool programs are available in most of the states. Thus, most Chinese parents have to send their children to American preschool programs. The fact is that it is a brand new and very different environment for children of Chinese cultural backgrounds to be in an American preschool program. For these Chinese children, they have to adapt to a new language, new behavioral norms, new classroom settings, new eating habits, and even new dressing habits. Research shows when children attend early childhood programs that are not culturally consistent with their home cultures, they are at risk of poor school performance and learning disabilities (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2009). As one Chinese boy recalled about his first day in an American preschool “I was very tired, hungry and confused” (D. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009).

Who will support these Chinese preschoolers dealing with a whole new school structure? Teachers have responsibilities to help and support these children from different cultures. In addition, a study shows that parental support is powerful during this period (Lovett & Haring, 2003). Findings show evidence that adequate preparation for the preschooler will help

children feel more secure and comfortable. However, Wong-Fillmore (1990) noted that immigrant parents often have difficulty providing their children with support because they themselves are going through the same transition and are exhausted and confused.

Thus, this project provides information for assisting Chinese parents in preparing their children as they enter into American preschools. These preparations include learning about the basic characteristics of American preschools, such as classroom setting, daily schedule, curriculum, parent involvement and so forth. American preschool culture will be compared to Chinese preschool culture and ways to make the transition between Chinese homes and American preschools will be explored.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to provide guidelines to Chinese parents for transitioning their children into American preschools. In this project, parents will learn about the differences between Chinese and American educational culture for young children and provide some strategies for home settings and activities that will help parents prepare their children for entering into American early learner programs.

Therefore, this project addresses the following two questions:

1. What are the different values and beliefs between American and Chinese educational culture for young children?

2. How is consistency developed between Chinese homes and American preschools?

Design of the Project

The outcome of this project will be a handbook available for interested parents. The handbook will include an overview of American preschool programs and an introduction to the difference between the education of Chinese young children and American children. It will provide Chinese parents an opportunity to realize and understand the different educational cultures and helps parents find some connections. The handbook will also offer strategies for home settings and preparations before the transition so that parents can help their children meet the challenges they face in the American preschool. Finally, the handbook will contain some home activities that parents can do with their children.

Definitions

1. Early childhood – the period in a child’s life from birth through age eight (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).
2. Transition – the period of time in which children move from home to school, from school to after-school activities, from one activity to another within a preschool, or from preschool to kindergarten (Lombardi, 1992).
3. Cultural Diversity – the variety of human societies or cultures in a specific region, or in the world as a whole.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Transition from Home to Preschool

Lovett and Haring (2003) defined transition as the process of change in service delivery systems and life circumstances. Kagan (1992) described two kinds of transition: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal transition encounters various settings, such as movement from home to school, whereas vertical transition focuses on movement among education programs. In Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of human development, he described transition as a change of context; transition from home to school was the first and major ecological transition for most young children in their educational life (Lam & Pollard, 2006). Lombardi (1992) defined transition as the time period in which children move from home to school, from school to after-school activities, from one activity to another with a preschool, or from preschool to kindergarten. The word transition has been defined by many researchers, but for the purposes of this project transition will be defined as going from the home environment to the preschool setting.

In Vygotsky's (1978) view, children's individual development and view of the world were shaped by the historical, cultural and institutional context. In the process of transition from home to preschool, young children have to

cross a cultural boundary from home to preschool and evolve from child to student. If home and preschool have different purposes, young children will face a totally different cultural model. Lam and Pollard (2006) also mentioned that family diversity should be addressed in the transition. For families with different cultural backgrounds, the transition from home to preschool may be a significant challenge. Roopnarine and Johnson (2009) indicated children were at risk when they attended early education programs that were not culturally consistent with their home cultures.

One Chinese mother (J. Li, personal communication, February 2, 2009) described the situation when her child went to an American preschool for the first time, “My girl grasped my clothes and tears displayed on her face. It was a terrible day for my girl. She did not want to go to school on the second day.” As this example shows, when Chinese children attend an American early childhood program, they may experience anxiety and confusion. Anxiety and confusion result partly from the new language environment and cultural norms. For Chinese children, when they enter into an American preschool, their home culture is not consistent with American preschool culture. They find that their former behaviors and past home experiences are no longer appropriate, and they need support in learning how to respond and behave in the new environment. This change is stressful.

How can the transition become smoother for Chinese children? Chinese parents should make some preparations before the transition. First, Chinese

parents need to prepare themselves. For most of the parents, they feel as anxious as their children about this transition. If parents' tensions are soothed, their children will also be calmed to face the change (Coppie & Bredekamp, 2009). Thus learning the different and similar beliefs in early childhood education between Chinese homes and American preschools, and making sense of basic characteristics of American preschools are effective methods for Chinese parents to make preparations. Then, Chinese parents can begin preparing their children for this transition. Increasing consistency between homes and schools can be regarded as an appropriate method for parents preparing their children for American preschools and can help make the transition smoother.

The Differences Between American Preschool Education and Chinese Young Children's Education

For typical Chinese parents, they received a traditional Chinese education and they bring their Chinese cultural background to America. Their viewpoints about early childhood education, preschools, and their expectations of education are significantly different than mainstream American parents. The main areas of difference include the following areas: focus on academic achievement, teacher-directed learning, perseverance, and group identity.

Academic Achievement vs. Play

One survey about “Why should a society have preschool?” (Tobin, Wu & Davidson, 1989) indicated that 67% of Chinese parents, compared to 22% of Americans, perceived that preschools should give children a good start academically. Sixty-two percent of American parents indicated that preschool gave children the experience of being a member of a group as their top choice. On the other hand, the second choice (42%) by American parents was that preschool gave children a chance to play with other children; in contrast, only 25% of the Chinese respondents chose this as their top choice. Vaughan (1993) stated that Chinese parents want their children to start academic work early. Moreover, Katz (1998) described his experiences in visiting some Chinese preschools in China, and indicated that Chinese parents hoped that their children could get more progress in academic growth in preschool. One study indicated that middle-class Chinese parents compare their children’s preschool by a few standards: English classes are taught by native speakers; students receive regular instrument training such as piano, violin, and so on; and advanced mathematics classes are available (Zhang, 2003). In addition, Pang and Ricky (2007) stated: “Parents in China typically are enthusiastic in support of their children with their studies and they have high expectations for their children’s academic success (p.2).” From these studies, we can infer that Chinese parents pay more attention to children’s academic achievement when their children are young than American parents. In most Chinese

parents' minds, preschool is a place to provide children an opportunity to learn language, writing, reading and counting and the basis for children to succeed in academic achievements. Based on the different expectations of the preschool, Chinese parents want the preschool curriculum to pay more attention to academic achievements.

However, American preschool philosophy regards play as one of the most important aspects of early childhood education. Roskos and Christie (2001) demonstrated that play had an important role in most early childhood education programs in America, especially some "Brand-name" programs such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and the Creative Curriculum. Lots of American educators and preschools spend much time exploring the benefits of play. "Play is an important vehicle for children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development" (Zigler, Singer & Bishop-Josef, 2004, p.9). Fox (2007) stated that play was an important part of developmentally appropriate early childhood education programs, as it is tied to physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development. Moreover, Fox also claimed that when children played, they recalled their past experiences, and they used these experiences to engage in the new activities and games. Forbes (2004) stated that early experience and play have a positive impact on the brain-wiring process. In addition, a study indicated that play facilitated cognitive development and play reflected and created thought (Roskos & Christie, 2007). Thus, play is considered an

essential component in the American preschool curriculum. A typical preschool daily schedule is shown in Table 1 (Dodge, Colker & Herorman, 2002):

Table 1. *Typical Preschool Daily Schedule*

Preschool Daily Schedule		
8:00-8:30	30 minutes	Preparation time
8:30-9:00	30 minutes	Arrival
9:00-9:15	15 minutes	Group time
9:15-10:15	60minutes	Choice time and small group
10:15-10:30	15 minutes	Snack time
10:30-10:40	10 minutes	Group time
10:40-11:40	60 minutes	Outdoor time
11:40-11:50	10 minutes	Story time
11:50-12:45	55 minutes	Lunch/ Closing(half-day program)
12:45-1:30	60-90 minutes	Rest time and story time
1:30-2:45	30 minutes	Choice time and small group
2:45-3:00	15 minutes	Closing and departure

In such a schedule, much more time is devoted to choice/ play compared to group instructional time. Children in American preschool programs have ample time to choose what they want to play. Compared to the American preschool schedule, the typical Chinese preschool schedule is from eight o'clock to 4pm from Monday through Friday. Full-time preschool programs

are more popular than the half-time programs in China. Chinese preschools spend much of the time on academic learning. The time to learn literacy, language, and mathematics must be covered in a typical Chinese preschool's daily schedule. In other words, Chinese preschool divides the school day into academic learning and relaxing. Cooney (1999) indicated that play is viewed as an activity to motivate children's physical development rather than intellectual development in China.

A comparison of Chinese and American parents' expectations on preschools shows that both Chinese parents and Chinese preschools set high expectations for academic achievement; in Chinese culture the preschool is regarded as an academic start. In Chinese culture and American culture, there are different perceptions and ideas on what the role of play is in the preschool. In Chinese culture, play and academic achievement are not combined together. This different viewpoint about the role of play results in a big challenge for Chinese parents when they choose an American early childhood program for their children.

Teacher-directed Learning vs. Child-initiated Learning

In traditional Chinese culture, the teacher is as an authoritative figure. Their behaviors and words are respected by students and parents. Students and parents believe that teachers are right about everything. One traditional Chinese belief is that the teacher is another parent for students. Respecting teachers means respecting the teacher's words and following their directions.

Confucius, a famous Chinese philosopher and thinker, stated that people should respect the leader, father and teacher. From ancient to modern China, Chinese regard teaching as a noble profession. Chinese parents believe that teachers are to direct their children in school (Pang & Ricky, 2007). The teacher is the leader in the school environment. Pang and Ricky (2007) also stated: "Parents always feel secondary to teachers, need to learn from teachers (p.4)." Moreover, Tobin et al. (1989) found that many Chinese parents feel that trained and experienced teachers were better suited than they were to socialize their children. Chinese parents believe that teachers are good leaders and guides for children. In other words, parents delegate their authority and power to teachers when their children transition from home to school. Vaughan (1993) mentioned, "I saw no cases of disrespect or lack of obedience to the teacher's requests in one Chinese kindergarten (p.2)." When sending children to school, a Chinese parent might say, "Follow the teacher's words.", whereas American parents typically say, "Have a good day." Comparing these details, one difference found is that Chinese parents expect that their preschool children are provided academic instruction by their teacher. In both Chinese school education and home education, the teaching method tends to be vertical with the teacher or parent on top and the child on bottom. Teacher-directed learning is the dominant teaching method in Chinese education (Pang & Ricky, 2007).

In American preschools, the debate about teacher-directed learning or

child-initiated learning has been long standing. Some teachers believe that allowing children to play is enough to support learning, but others suggest that the best way for children to learn is for teachers to guide them directly. The debate was not fully addressed by the National Research Council Report (2001) that made a clear case for the use of diverse strategies, including both child-initiated learning and direct teaching (Dodge et al., 2002). However, based upon the American preschool's daily schedule noted earlier, child-initiated learning is the leading method, compared to teacher-directed learning. According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), adults should provide opportunities for children to participate in child-directed practice skills as a self-chosen activity and offer children the choice to participate in a small group or in a solitary activity. Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) indicates that children need opportunities to practice skills to assimilate their learning. Thus, it is assumed that repetition that is initiated and directed by the child, not adult-directed drill and practice, is most valuable for assimilation. Such an approach is in sharp contrast to the teacher-directed approach in traditional Chinese preschools.

Perseverance vs. Quick to Change Activities

Perseverance is an important value in Chinese culture. It also influences their definition of education. The ancient tale *Yu Gong Yi Shan* is an important children's story read by teachers and parents in China. The story is about an old man who persisted in digging away at a mountain separating his

village from a nearby town. Facing his friend's ridicule, the old man said, "I will dig until I die and then my sons and grandsons and their sons and grandsons will continue. The mountain can grow no higher, and with every shovelful we make it that much lower. " This story has often been used by Chinese educators and parents to illustrate the power of persistence. Persistence is regarded as a main factor in overcoming obstacles. Thus, teachers and parents encourage children to work on one thing for a long time. In order to practice children's perseverance, Chinese parents send children to learn a Chinese strategic board game called "Go" after school or during vacations. Go is played by two players who place black and white stones on the vacant intersections of a grid of 19×19 lines. In the process of playing Go, players need strategies for controlling their opponent, and patience. Most Go matches last at least three hours. For young children, when they play Go, they need persistence to finish the game. This demonstrates respect to the opponent. Generally, persistence is viewed as an essential virtue in Chinese culture.

In contrast, children in America are rarely expected or encouraged to stick to one task for longer than twenty minutes (Tobin et al., 1989). In American preschools, therefore, freedom of choice performs an important role. Katz (1998) indicated that the United States promotes an open society. In this society, the goals of the schools are to provide an open environment for children to follow their individual ideas. In American preschools, children

have more opportunities to make choices on when they want to stop their projects and start a new one or what they want to play and/or have more free time for self-direction (Pang & Ricky, 2007).

Group Identity vs. Individual Identity

Other differences between Chinese and American cultural mores are manifested in preschools. Through reading Chinese poems and books and watching Chinese films, group awareness is often addressed. China is a group-oriented society compared to individually-oriented Western countries. Building a harmonious society is one of the main goals for the Chinese government. This ideal was even depicted in the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games where the Chinese character of “Harmony” was displayed. One study found that Chinese education approached group identity and individual transgression more and that far more Chinese than Americans believed in the importance of teaching children to be patriotic and group-oriented (Katz, 1998). On the other hand, American educators paid more attention to the rights and priority of the individual. Pang and Ricky (2007) stated that children in America are treated as an individual, no different from adults. Moreover, Tobin et al. (1989) suggested that Americans held a strong belief in the essential un-alikeness of same-age children in temperament, interests, and rate of development. Another strong belief is the right of every child to have his/her needs met through the curriculum. In China, it is assumed that what is good for the group will be good for the

individual.

*The Similarities Between American Preschool Education and
Chinese Young Children's Education*

Although there are some differences between American preschool education and Chinese education, similarities also exist between them.

Independence

Both Americans and Chinese regard independence as a vital part of preschool, despite the American view that independence is a unique Western trait. Chinese children who were born in the early 1980s were labeled as a “dependent generation” because they were the first of the one-child generation. In many homes, two parents and four grandparents cared for one child, making that child the consistent center of attention. Many Chinese educators worried about this generation. However, the home environment and school education of this generation provided a great opportunity to think about how to develop children's independence. Therefore, in China, the discussion about children's independence started some years ago (Z. Zhang, personal communication, January 21, 2009). With rapid changes in society and the economy in China, focusing on developing children's independence is an important part of Chinese early childhood education. Early educators and parents realize the importance of independence.

Parent's Role

In both American and Chinese education cultures, parents are regarded as the first teacher for their children. Parent involvement is an essential aspect of the preschool environment. On the other hand, according to Ogbu (1992) who discussed immigrant parent's involvement, Chinese and Indian immigrant parents desired more economic well-being and greater political freedom; therefore, their expectations continue to affect the way they respond to many events, including their children's schooling. This study indicates that Chinese immigrant parents desire to participate in their children's school activities. For Chinese immigrant parents, participating in school activities is a great way to learn about American culture and society.

Basic Characteristics of the American Preschool

Many Chinese children who attend American preschools feel that they have to choose between the practices they learn at home and the ones they are expected to follow at school (Katz, 1998). Thus, if Chinese parents know the basic features and characteristics of American preschools before they send their children to school, they can share the information with their children and help them deal with conflicted feelings. Following are fundamental aspects of an American preschool that Chinese parents should be familiar with in order to help their child transition into that setting.

Classroom Setting

In most American preschools, the classroom is divided into areas for block building, toys and games, dramatic play, looking at books and writing, computer activities, sand and water play, and a discovery table. For some creative classrooms, art, music and movement and cooking areas are also parts of the classroom (Dodge et al., 2002). In the American preschool, building a safe, attractive, well-designed and comfortable learning environment helps children engage in activities and explore their interests. For some classrooms with enough room, establishing a group area is required, but if the classroom has limited space, some block areas or libraries are used for group time. Moreover, the materials in the classroom are displayed and labeled.

Learning Content

In American preschools, six curriculum areas are addressed. According to Dodge et al. (2002), the six areas include literacy, mathematics, science, social skills, arts and technology.

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000) indicated how preschools should support children to become effective readers. They described seven components of literacy for preschool children, including increased vocabulary and language, phonological awareness, knowledge of print, letters and words, comprehension, understanding books and other texts and literacy as a source of enjoyment.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2000) defined what preschool children should learn in math, including number concepts which are the foundation of mathematics, patterns and relationships, geometry and spatial sense, measurement and data collections, organization and representation. In number concepts, quantity, comparison, and number symbols are also contained. Moreover, recognizing pattern and relationship is also related to children's science and literacy developments (Dodge et al., 2002). In measurement, children will develop an understanding of the uses of measuring and the measuring tools.

In the science field, American preschools teach three components which contain physical science, life science, and Earth and the environment. In an American preschool, educators try to put scientific and isolated facts together into meaningful ideas. Physical science is the physical properties of materials and objects; life science focuses on living things and the world of nature pertains to earth and the environment (Dodge et al., 2002).

The contexts of social studies include physical spaces and geography, people and how they live, people and the environment, and people and the past. In other words, social studies are about the study of people. Preschoolers will continue the "study" of social studies afterschool when visiting supermarkets, different sorts of stores, and so on (National Research Council, 1996).

Furthermore, according to the Consortium of National Arts Education

Associations (1994), the components of arts include dance, music, performing arts and visual arts such as painting, drawing, collages, sculpting of clay, and so on. When children join in the dancing activity, they learn about the body's ability to move. Music provides children with opportunities to listen to and interact with many kinds of sounds. Children recognize the relationship between messages and actions through performing arts. In addition, children are also taught technology in the preschool. Technology education consists of awareness of technology, basic operations and concepts, technology tools, and people and technology ((Dodge et al., 2002).

Teacher's Role

In American preschools, teachers have a responsibility to create a well-designed environment, and an appropriate curriculum for children to learn. In this process, teachers seek to know each child's interests and strengths through observing. After observing, teachers guide children through an appropriate curriculum. In this process, teachers choose either child-initiated or a teacher-directed method to interact with children to promote their learning (Dodge et al., 2003). In addition, assessing children's learning is another role that preschool teachers play in America. Through collecting facts, analyzing and evaluating what children learn, American preschool teachers typically use the information and knowledge to make a plan for each child. Moreover, teachers also have the responsibility to support and make special plans for families of children with disabilities, families with

low socioeconomic status, or families with different cultural backgrounds. For teachers who work with families with different cultural backgrounds, Brodtkin (2006) suggested that teachers should know the family's culture and build a rapport with parents, then, teachers need to figure out how to help children feel at home, without losing the richness and pride in their own culture. Chinese parents should expect that they will be asked many questions about their child and that the teacher will be working to have that child become a part of the classroom.

Assessment

In America, no matter what programs children attend, such as a part-time playgroup, Head Start, a child-care center or a special education program, teachers in these settings have similar demands for assessment. The most common goals of preschool assessment include selecting the most appropriate preschool program, planning for instruction, referring for special services, and helping transition to kindergarten or first grade (Mindes, 2007).

Teachers in American preschools are required to select appropriate formal and informal assessment methods, based mainly on observing and recording. Mindes (2007) stated that the processes of the developmentally appropriate assessment were “continuous, directed to all developmental areas, completely integrated with curriculum and instruction, collaborative between teachers and parents, and helpful to teachers in their planning to meet the needs of children and the goal of the program (p.35).” Many teachers report

the assessment results to parents by way of portfolios. For some children with special needs, formal planning and documentation such as Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) are available. Thus, Chinese parents should anticipate that their child's teacher will be assessing each child in a variety of ways for different purposes.

Developing Consistency Between Home and Preschool

For Chinese children who participate in American preschools, cultural inconsistencies may make them feel that they have to choose between the environment and practices they live and learn at home and the ones they are expected to follow at school (Katz, 1998). This confusion may make Chinese children at risk in American preschools. According to the Ecologic Systems Theory, a child is affected by the microsystem (that is the closest to the child such as family, father and mother, and any other settings), the mesosystem (including school, educators and peers), the exosystem (like local government), and macrosystem (involving dominant beliefs and ideology of society). The child is the core in this system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Puckett & Black, 2004). When the linkages between the systems are characterized by harmony and positive interactions, child growth and development can be positively affected (Puckett & Black, 2004). However, positive transitions across the four systems do not happen automatically or accidentally. Parents provide not only the genes for their children's development, but also the

background of experiences their children need to succeed in school (Colson, 1979). Chinese parents need to help their children make the connections between home and preschool before transitioning them.

Home Setting

Children's home experience affects their successes in school (Health, 1983). Another study indicated that skills such as literacy, language, and social skills acquisition relate to the experiences with which children were familiar with in the home (Shapiro, 1994). Moreover, Lee (1997) stated that the home environment was also a significant predictor of academic achievement. For Chinese preschoolers, their home environment will influence the degree to which the transition from Chinese homes to American preschools is successful.

Prepare Children for the Transition

Most parents prefer to use verbal messages to help remind their children that they will be moving to a new environment. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) list the messages that parents typically use. The common messages American parents like to use are following:

"Next year you'll be in preschool, and you'll have to follow teacher's directions."

"In preschool, you'll learn language, reading and counting."

"You'd better learn how to write your name now because you have to know it when you start preschool."

“You’ll have new friends when you go to the preschool.”

However, Copple and Bredekamp (2009) also indicate that vague warnings about unfamiliar situations only result in heightening children’s anxieties about transition. Therefore, an appropriate way is to provide children firsthand experiences, such as visiting the American preschool and meeting the new teacher. If children feel uncomfortable in meeting the new teacher, parents should talk to the teacher and let them write a letter/note or draw a picture for the children. Given that most teachers can not write Chinese, parents should translate the letter into Chinese for the children; this will help the child feel more comfortable with their new teacher. After visiting classrooms or reading letters, Chinese parents should share their feelings with their children and encourage them to talk about their feelings. Visiting, sharing and listening will help prepare the child for the transition and help make the experience positive.

Language

The difference between home language (Chinese) and school language (English) is another factor that results in frustration when Chinese children enter into American preschools. Schmidt (1994) suggested that the children experienced a language conflict when the home language and school language were different. Most Chinese parents try to overcome this difference, so they use English that substitutes for Chinese at home. However, one study shows that continuing to speak the home language benefits the

children in becoming bilingual (Haworth, et al., 2006). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2004) suggests that parents should maintain their home language, and the research Tabors conducted in 1997 indicated that children with a strong foundation in their home language did better in school. In addition, Ratliff and Montague (2002) indicated that parents are essential in helping their children keep their home language and develop a second language, and that continuing to use the home language is important for young children for developing the second language. Therefore, Chinese parents should speak Chinese at home. Language is also a great way to maintain one's own culture. However, Chinese parents must be sensitive to the need for their child to be developing skills in English as she/he continues development in their home language. To this extent, American preschool teachers have responsibilities to report Chinese children's English development to Chinese parents in a detailed and timely manner.

Generally, it is normal for Chinese parents to confuse what language they will use at home in America. But Chinese parents should realize that they have the main responsibility for their children to keep their home language, and American teachers will support Chinese children's English development.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE PROJECT

The Design of the Project

The product of this project is a parent handbook for Chinese children's transition from their homes to American preschools. This parent handbook will target Chinese parents with three year-old children. This handbook is divided into four main sections. The first section will emphasize the common characteristics of American preschools including classroom setting, daily schedule, learning content, and assessment. The second section will provide parents with suggestions and ideas on how to prepare children for the transition, mainly in the home setting. Activities for literacy, science, social/emotional development, mathematics, and arts will be given in the third section for parents to do with their children at home. This parent handbook focuses on Chinese parents, so English and Chinese versions are both available. The parent handbook follows the following format:

I. Overview of the General American Preschool

- Classroom Setting
- Daily Schedule
- Learning Content
- Teacher's Role
- Assessment

II. Suggestions on Transition Consistency between Chinese Homes and American Preschools

- Home Setting
- Preparations for the Transition
- Language

III. Activity

- Today, I Feel.....
- One-week Reading
- Making Puppets
- Observing One Plant

IV. References

V. Appendix

Handbook "Today, I feel....."

Limitations

This project is specifically designed for Chinese parents whose children will transition from home to an American preschool. Its purpose is to support parent learning about common information on American preschools and provide suggestions and ideas for a consistent transition between Chinese homes and American preschools. It does not make deep explorations into American preschools, and it does not cover all the different styles of preschools or programs in America, such as Reggio Emilia, Head Start, Montessori, and so on. Moreover, this project specifically targets Chinese parents that have only been in America for a couple of years. Second generation American-Chinese parents do not need to be concerned with this project.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This project is the outgrowth of the writer's growing awareness of the importance of the transition from Chinese homes to American preschools. Parents play a vital role in preparing for the transition. For Chinese children, it is a challenge to transition from Chinese homes to American preschools. The new culture, language, and classroom settings become obstacles that Chinese children must learn to navigate. It is important for parents to support their children during this transition. For some Chinese parents that are just starting to adapt to the new culture, they need some guidelines for preparing their children for the transition. In order to increase the value of this parent handbook, it has been modified based on the feedback from eight Chinese families who live in Idaho, Alabama, and California. The feedback and modifications are shown in Table 2. Hopefully, this parent handbook can provide some valuable information for these Chinese parents.

Table 2. *Feedback from Eight Chinese Families*

Feedback from Chinese Families		
Number of Families	Feedback from Families	Modifications
2	Translation is confusing	Translate into Chinese dependent on meanings
3	Add more information about language	Add a summary about language in the handbook
4	Add information about how to get children's books in Chinese	Add websites in the handbook
3	Use the activity “observe a plant” at home	
1	If parents do not know about using a sewing machine, offer other suggestions for how to do “Making A Puppet” activity	Recommend using super glue or staples Encourage parents to learn how to use the sewing machine with their children
2	More information about Montessori and Head Start programs	Send resources about these programs to them
1	More information about toilet reading	Hold on

Recommendations

1. Copies of this handbook can be placed in preschools enrolling Chinese children where parents can read it.
2. The handbook can be discussed and copies provided in Chinese classes.
3. Copies can be placed in some Chinese churches.
4. Copies can be shared with some Chinese preschool teachers in America.
5. Copies can be given to expectant Chinese parents as gifts.

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APPENDIX

Parent Handbook